

Your mental health—Coping with the holidays

by Terrel L. Templeman, Ph.D.

(Editor's note: This is the seventh in a series of articles entitled "Your mental health." Readers are invited to send comments or questions about these articles to: Dr. Terry Templeman, Morrow County Mental Health Services, P.O. Box 554, Heppner, Oregon, 97836.

The holiday season, with all its hustle and bustle, is upon us. Traditionally of course, the holiday season is a time of joy and togetherness. It is less well known that this season is also a time of stress and depression for many people.

What is stressful about the holiday season? First, it falls at the end of the year when the weather becomes harsher, the days grow shorter, the nights grow longer, and the landscape looks bleaker. December gives us that first taste of winter, when it is more difficult to get out, more hazardous to travel, and takes more effort just to keep warm. The end of the year is also a time when we reflect on the past and ourselves, what we accomplished during the year and what we did not. For some reason it is often easier to focus more on the negative than the positive aspects of our past actions—projects that never got finished or that wasteline that never did slim down. Focusing on the negative about the past can lead to self-criticism and pessimism about the future.

Second, we are also more prone to fall into "either-or thinking" at Christmas time. Things have to be perfect or we feel cheated and disappointed in ourselves. We think of ourselves as either filled with the holiday spirit or as complete Scrooges. There is no room for middle ground. The gifts we select have to be "just right" or we may label ourselves failures as gift givers. Even trivial occurrences such as being late with packages, burning dinner, or catching a cold can "ruin" the holidays for us if we get into the

"either-or" rut.

Third, we are most painfully aware of the loss of a loved one or a family disruption during the holidays. After all, this is the time when family togetherness is emphasized. Feelings of grief over a death or a divorce are very common at Christmas even if the losses themselves occurred many months before. Being without any family at this time of year leads to stronger feelings of loneliness than at other times of the year.

What can be done to cope with the holidays? First, if you know in advance that this season is a difficult time for you, make allowances for yourself to get through it. Take things one at a time and one day at a time. Don't try to accomplish everything at once and don't put yourself down for not having the "holiday spirit" as much as you would like.

Second, if you are feeling pessimistic about the past year, reevaluate the year from someone else's point of view. Would you be as critical of your neighbor's lack of accomplishments as you are of your own?

Third, remember that the past does not control the future: you are not bound by any law to live in the same way next year as you lived this year.

Fourth, allow yourself to enjoy the holidays as they are, even if they don't live up to your ideas of how they should be. Fifth, schedule activities which get you out of the house and prove to yourself that you don't have to be confined because of the weather or the long nights. Such activities can be as simple as crossing the street to visit a neighbor.

Finally, if you are experiencing personal loss at Christmas time, you will probably feel better if you talk about it with someone instead of forcing your way through the holiday with a stiff upper lip. Sharing your feelings with your pastor, a close friend, or a mental health counselor can be very helpful.

United Methodist Christmas musical to be Dec. 21

The community is invited to attend a Christmas musical, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," being performed by the children and adults of the Heppner United Methodist Church. This delightful play is a fantasy on the Christmas story as it was experienced by the star which shone over the Bethlehem stable.

The director is Jean Brazell. Members of the cast are Kim Warren, Kirsten Green, Bobby Krein, Kathleen Brazell, Paula Heatherly, Lori Patterson, Brian Brazell, Christy Stroeber, Tiffani Harrison, Jeanie Patterson, Trent Harrison, Cindy Stroeber, Mike Sheridan, Ken Batty, Kay Patterson, John Bier, Penny Connor, Travis Harrison, Mark Fishburn, Beth Heatherly, Karen Howe, Erin Fishburn, Kurt Helphinstine, Jenny Krein, Rick Koffler, Evan Weygandt, Bryan Wright, Colin Anderson, Kharis Templeman, and the adult choir.

The performance is set for Sunday December 21 at 7 p.m. in the Heppner United Methodist Church Sanctuary, with refreshments following.

Ione Church of Christ plans Christmas service

A Christmas service, sponsored by the Board of Christian Education, is planned for Sunday, Dec. 21 at 5 p.m. at the Ione United Church of Christ.

The service, under the direction of the Board of Christian Education chairperson, Lorene Griffith, will involve Sunday school children, youth group members and adults. Sunday school teachers, Della Heideman, Carmen French, Jean Jepsen, Linda Conklin and Sharlene Arends will help in leadership. Helen Martin will be accompanist.

Many others will share music and the youth will enact a drama entitled "What Are You Looking For?" which includes spoken parts and music.

After the service a simple supper will be served. Then the Senior High Youth Fellowship invites everyone to come caroling around the town. The singers will go on foot, and will present gifts of bread, baked by the youth fellowship, to the elderly of the community. Young children should be accompanied by an adult.

Wedding reception in honor of Rills Sat.

Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Rill cordially invite friends and relatives to an open house wedding reception Saturday, Dec. 20, from 2 to 4 p.m. at 360 S. Main, Heppner.

The couple requests no gifts please.

Listeners, singers invited to impromptu 'Messiah'

In celebration of Christmas, listeners and singers are invited to participate in an impromptu presentation of Handel's "Messiah," at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 23, at the United Methodist Church in Heppner.

The Reverend John Maas says that a simplified score of the "Messiah," especially the Christmas section, will be featured and that there will be no prior rehearsals. Four instrumentalists have already indicated that they will play, said Maas. Singers and musicians, as well as listeners are invited to attend.

Maas added that there will be a small charge for copies of the sheet music. Refreshments will be served.

Knits-n-bits decide on fair projects

by Trina Palmer

The Knits-n-Bits 4-H Knitting Club held their third meeting on Dec. 3.

Club members worked on knitting. Some people have decided what they are going to make for fair.

Tareena Nash is making a white sweater. Dawn Palmer is making yellow and white slippers. Trina Palmer is making a pink roll-brim hat and a muffler scarf. Jennifer Rill is making a pullover sweater.

Noella and Jennifer Rill were absent this meeting.

This meeting was held at Debbie Hyatt's house. Cake and punch were provided by Debbie. This meeting lasted from 3:30 to 5 p.m.

The next meeting will be Dec. 17, at 3:30, at Debbie's house.

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